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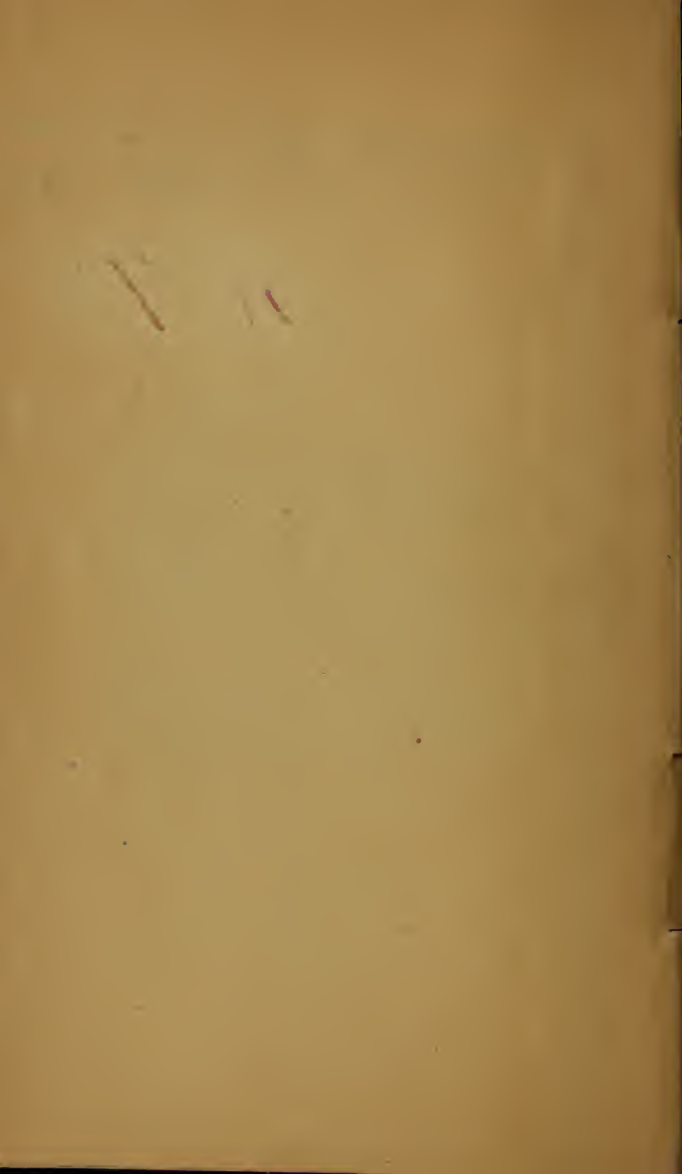
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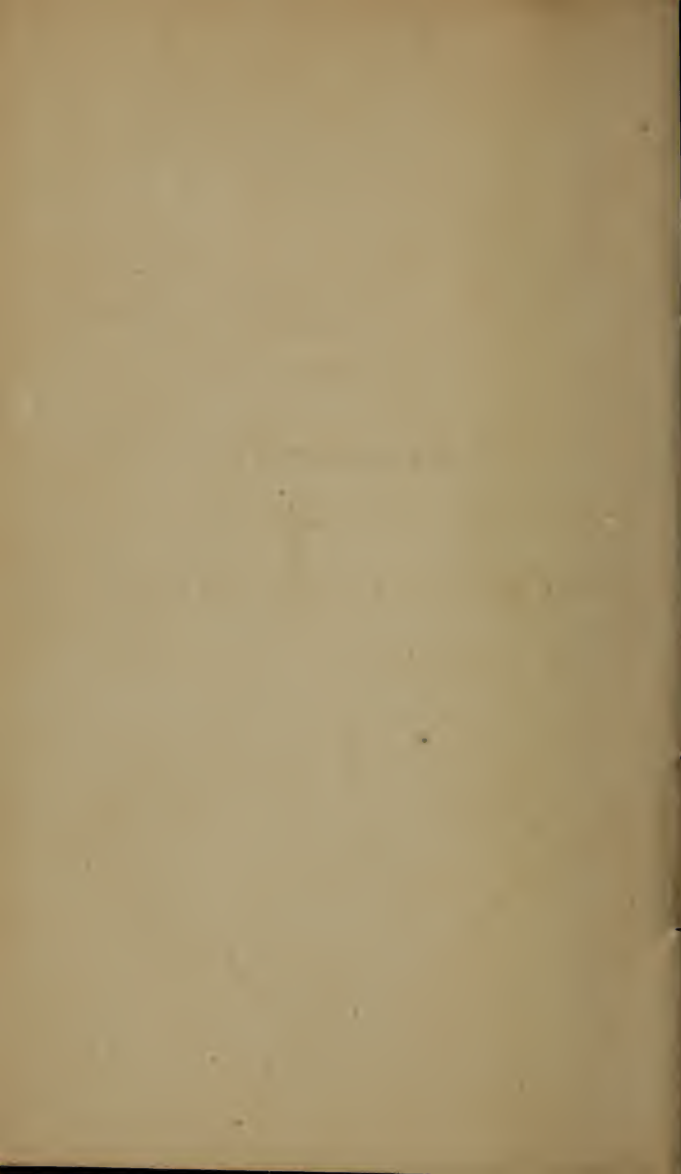
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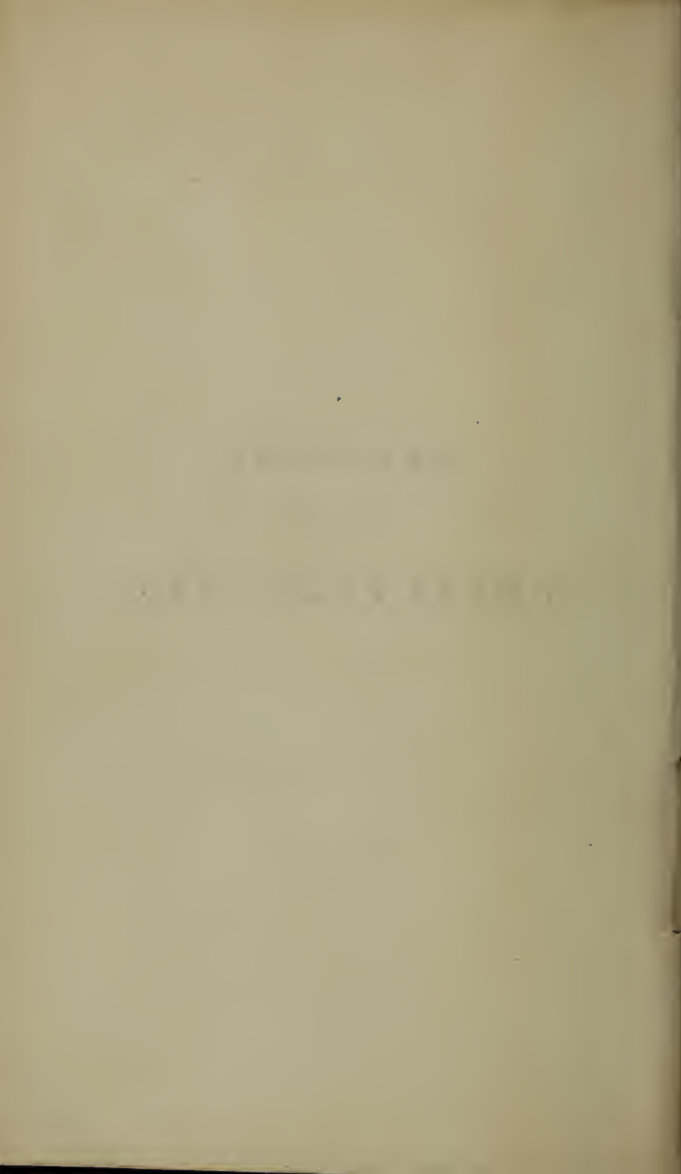
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PROGRESS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE.



PROGRESS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE;
BEING A
SEQUEL
TO THE
"FORMATION OF THE CHRISTIAN CHARACTER."

17
1522a
By HENRY WARE, JR., D.D.

Second Edition.



BOSTON:
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ADVERTISEMENT.

AT the period when Mr. Ware's health began irrecoverably to fail, and just before he was obliged to give up all occupation, he was devoting his hours of leisure to the preparation of a sequel to his work on the Formation of the Christian Character, which he designed to entitle "Progress of the Christian Life." Several chapters only were finished. They are too valuable to be lost, and are here published in the hope that they may be useful. The reader will form by them an idea of what the sequel would have been if its author had lived to finish it.

C. R.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE following pages are designed as a sequel to the little work on the Formation of the Christian Character, and are supposed to be addressed to the same persons. When one has adopted the Christian faith as his rule of life, and begun in earnest his religious existence, it is still but the commencement of a career in which an indefinite progress is to be made, and which is to continue forever. As long as man is imperfect, there is room for improvement. As long as he is in the flesh, there is occasion for watchfulness and struggling against temptation. There is need that his principles become more and more fixed, his conscience more and more enlight-

ened and controlling, his passions more thoroughly obedient to the law of righteousness, and his whole temper and demeanor more steadfastly conformed to the example of Christ. In a word, he is to *grow* in grace. Advancement is his duty, perfection his aim.

It is with regard to this duty of religious progress that I propose to offer a few hints. There are some errors respecting it prevalent among believers, which I would first attempt to rectify ; and then I would explain its true nature and character, remove discouragements, and show the means and steps by which it should proceed, and how actual success is to be ascertained.

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N. B. The following titles of additional chapters or sections are given in Mr. Ware's manuscript :—

Hinderances. How Progress manifests itself, and is to be ascertained. Progress in Knowledge, in Self-government, in Spirituality of Temper, in Conscientiousness, in Disinterestedness, in Power to resist Temptation. In what sense Perfection is to be expected, &c. &c.

PROGRESS
OF THE
CHRISTIAN LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

ERRORS RESPECTING THE DUTY OF RELIGIOUS
PROGRESS NOTICED AND CORRECTED — ES-
PECIALLY THE ERROR THAT THE CHRIS-
TIAN LIFE, HAVING BEEN BEGUN, IS AC-
COMPLISHED.

Nothing can be plainer than that the Christian character is a thing to be *acquired* and to be *improved*; yet it is evident that many do not so regard it. If we may judge from their conduct, the number is not small of those who esteem it something which belongs to them just as the body does, and to be kept alive and in health just like that,

by living along from day to day, as the circumstances of each day may suggest, but not to be the subject of any special regard. But as to being every day better than the day before, as to being more humble and charitable this year than they were last, it does not enter their mind, it makes no part of their plan. They have been Christians, they say, as long as they can remember; they always believed in the gospel, and meant to do their duty. But they do not know more about the history and foundation, the nature and purposes, of their religion, nor are they in any respect more devoted. Indeed, when one thinks seriously on the subject, it is a matter of amazement to him to observe how stationary good men are, and how quietly they content themselves with being so.

It is not so in other matters. We look around us on the community, and we see it in a state of commotion and advancement. Its prosperity is a wonder to us, and that prosperity is progress. Every one is pushing forward. Every one is eager and panting for success. Our young men rise step by step; they are discontented if they find it other-

wise. Those who began life with nothing are seen in a few years comfortably living with a family around them, — then entering a larger dwelling, supporting a more extensive establishment, and in various expenses evincing the advancement they have made. This is common. But meantime — even if they account themselves Christians, and remember that they have an eternity as well as a family to provide for — they have not dreamed of exhibiting any proportionate advancement of character ; it has not occurred to them that their piety should have grown with their estate ; that their charities should have been as much greater than formerly as their income has become larger ; that, as they have been rising in the world, they should have risen also toward heaven. In the eye of the world, they are better dressed and better lodged, and they move in a more fashionable and intellectual circle ; but in the eye of God, in their preparation for heaven, they are just where they were. They have contrived to give the soul just food enough to keep it of the same stature — not considering that it was to grow as well as the

body — not considering, indeed, that this eager attention to worldly good, and rapid growth in earthly prosperity, have very probably stunted the growth of their characters.

How salutary might it prove to every one whom Providence has blessed with an increase of goods, if, at every enlargement of his style of living, he should devote one day to searching into his spiritual progress, and resolve never to erect a new house, or introduce a higher indulgence to his domestic economy, until he could honestly say, that he was as much improved in character as in fortune !

But, alas ! this is far from being the way of the world. They are satisfied to seem to themselves no worse than they were ; — if they deeply examined themselves, they might discover that they are, in fact, much worse.

Amid this universal and earnest struggle for the outside life, the inner life is neglected ; and very good men are entirely content to be no better, who could ill brook to be no richer.

Certainly this indicates a false idea of the true object of life, and a very imperfect ac-

quaintance with that religion which they profess to have taken for their guide. I do not treat the question in its reference to mere men of the world. On their principles they are right. With a worldly man, character is of very little consequence. If he be not dishonest, so as to be in danger of the law, — if he keep a decent reputation for fairness and the social virtues, so as not to hinder his success by becoming obnoxious to others, — what more can he need? His business is to make his fortune and enjoy himself more and more every year; and this he can do perfectly well without being a better man. This, therefore, need be no part of his concern. But with those who profess to look beyond the world, to whom the favor of God is of some consequence, as well as the opinion of men, and who soberly believe that virtue is better than wealth, — with such as I am now addressing, — it should be the chief concern. Is it possible that they can have adopted Christ as their Master, and taken his religion as the great guide and blessing of their souls, knowing themselves to be immortal, and yet be satisfied to see their earthly condition pros-

perous while there are no signs of their souls' prosperity? Surely the last must be their great anxiety and care, or they are strangely false to their principles. There is no incompatibility between the two; both may advance together; but to strive only for the earthly is treachery to their principles. Alas! then, how many such traitors are there!

But there is another class. All do not, even in this prosperous community, succeed in their anxious efforts to advance themselves in the world. Many make no progress. They gain no wealth, they never enlarge their means of living and enjoyment, they live on as they began. Perhaps they are content with their lot. Many, it is well known, are perfectly so. They acquiesce in the allotment of Providence, and quietly sit down where God has appointed them. But many more have tried to rise, and in vain. Are they satisfied then? Do they content themselves? Do they make no effort further? Do they feel no regret, mortification, and longing? Surely not so. Waking and dreaming, they are haunted by the restless desire

and the unquenched hope of reinstating their fortunes. And yet, though they know that their souls are equally far from prosperity, and that they have made no improvement in religious knowledge and virtue, it does not make them uneasy; they are perfectly willing it should be so. They are quite content to find themselves no better Christians; but they cannot bear to find themselves no more wealthy.

It was a beautiful wish of the disciple whom Jesus loved, when writing to a dear friend, "that he might be in health and prosper *even as his soul prospered.*" I fear it would be thought a strange wish now, even amongst those who esteem themselves very good disciples. They would not understand how the prosperity of the soul is the first thing. Many, it is to be feared, do not even place it second. Business, money-getting, is first; their family, second; religion is postponed to the third place, at least, and very little honored in that, if we may judge by its advancement in comparison with that of the other two.

There are undoubtedly other classes to be

found, besides those whom I have now named. They need not be described. They leave but a small number to be found scattered among us, here and there, as we look around, whose business, aim, object, is the growth of their character, who live for the sake of the soul, and who evidently, markedly, become better men as they advance in life. We would not be cynical in our estimate, but none can look around on society, Christian society, — recollecting with what capacities for goodness men have been endowed, and what inducements to progress toward perfection are always before them, — without a feeling of amazement, mortification, and alarm, at observing how few are growing, or striving to grow, in the virtues of the Christian life. So rare are such instances, that they are looked on, and spoken of, as bright exceptions; and a measure of goodness which ought to be that of every man, nay, which all acknowledge to be still far short of what the Christian should be, is described, praised, and held forth to imitation as something extraordinary — as, indeed, beyond what men in general are expected to attain. “We

are not to *expect* to find others as good as he."

This defective tone and condition of society is unquestionably a great hinderance to those who are young in religion. It presents to them, on their first entrance to a new principle, instead of examples that stimulate to effort and excellence, and raise still higher their impressions of the purity and spirituality of Christian attainment, specimens of lagging, sluggish, moderate virtue, which countenance them in the most indolent exertions for improvement. As they look forward with the glowing mind of youth and the first beatings of awakened faith, the Christian life looks to them not only all light and glorious, but of a strict and holy austerity, and a scrupulous purity which has no part or lot with the ordinary follies of humanity — elevated above the world by a taste which has no pleasure in its perishing pursuits, and a habit of exalted contemplation which dwells amid things unseen and eternal. They begin the race, therefore, with feelings of high aspiration. They take their place among the disciples with a romantic and earnest expecta-

tion of finding in those privileged persons something, they know not what, of a celestial temper and beauty: they expect to be incited, cheered, instructed, by the very contact, and to find in the atmosphere in which they dwell the radiance and perfume of heaven. And if they could find it so, they would keep alive their own ardor, they would persevere to realize their own exalted conceptions. But they find it otherwise. The image which they had conceived in their own minds of what the Christian man ought to be — an image whose features were all drawn from the life and teaching of the Great Master — is not at all realized in the world. Nobody acts up to it. Nobody seems to have it in mind. The common standard is wholly below it; and these young beginners find themselves alone, with an idea and purpose of a perfection which the more experienced smile upon as the extravagant dream of youth, which a few more days will show them to be impracticable in such a world as this. Thus the actual state of religious feeling chills the early blossoms of their religious characters; they find that much less than they had

imagined is thought sufficient by the older and wiser disciples, who must know much better than themselves ; that it is by no means requisite to follow Christ so nearly, or worship God so exclusively, as they had fancied ; they discover that, in fact, they have made as great attainments already as the world would bear ; to proceed further would be only to become singular : so they change their purpose, and remain where they are ; unwilling to be better than others ; satisfied with a measure which seems to satisfy others, and glad to learn that the great work they had undertaken is so early completed. And thus each generation does its utmost to repress the aspiration of the next, and to keep down the standard of virtuous attainment.

So powerful is the example of the society around us, and such the influence of prevailing notions to modify our own, that few have courage or perseverance to follow the inward suggestion which urges them to rise higher. So that a distinguished minister gave it as his earnest advice to a young friend, not to allow himself to be ordained as pastor of any church in which the standard of life was not

very strict and high; because, as he urged, all experience shows how almost impossible it is for a young minister to escape conforming himself to the sentiment around him, and being shaped more or less by the popular mould. If it be thus to be apprehended in the case of one all whose *temporal* interests urge him, no less than his *eternal*, to rise to the MARK, how much more must it be so with ordinary men, who are less protected by the circumstances of their position, and the daily duties of their calling!

It is, therefore, evidently, one of the first duties of the young Christian to settle it in his mind that he has only commenced a work which is to be going on as long as he shall exist. Every thing in the example and experience of others around him proves how necessary this is, for it proves how easily he may be made to forget it.

There are also some mistaken notions respecting religion itself which may lead to the same error; the idea, namely, which so readily finds a welcome in the mind which is glowing with the first happiness of its early faith, that its glow cannot fade away; that things

will always appear to the soul just as they do at that divine moment; that the new taste is fixed, and cannot be changed; that it will take care of itself. Hazardous and unfounded as such a feeling is, it is yet very natural. It belongs to all strong emotion to have faith in its own perpetuity. The affections always are confident that they never shall change; and we always fancy that the grief, or love, or indignation, which fills our bosoms now, can never fade from them. When, therefore, we are awake to the vivid consciousness of our spiritual relations, and are overwhelmed with those various and mingling emotions that take possession of the excited spirit, and blend there in all that is awful, tender, joyous, and serene — when we are confident that now, at last, we are tasting the highest gratification of which human nature is capable, that now, at last, we are in the state in which man ought to be, — a state in which things appear as they are, in their true relations and proportions, and the common things of the world take rank among the insignificant and uninteresting, — we cannot doubt that these, the truest, will be the lasting feelings; we cannot conceive it possible that

any thing on earth should ever have charm enough to entice from this state ; that any of the things which we now know to be inferior should ever be able to withdraw us from what we now know to be supreme. This is the hearty, honest, deeply-seated conviction within us. This is the conviction which occasions the well-known confidence and presumption of young converts, which prompts to their proverbial forwardness — a confidence and forwardness often attributed to unworthy motives, and spoken of to their discredit. It may not be creditable to them ; yet it argues nothing worse, perhaps, than self-ignorance. They do not know the evanescent character of the feelings, the deceitfulness of the heart ; therefore they give way to it ; they trust themselves ; they spread all their sails to the wind, as if it would never change ; they fancy themselves established, and act warmly and boldly, as if established. But this glow is necessarily transient, like all vehement feeling ; and when it has passed away, they have no abiding principle of life to take its place and keep the work in progress. Other feelings rise up in the midst of the world ; the brightness of the spiritual light fades from

before the eye of the soul, and there is no advancement to a higher perfection.

Let no one, therefore, from the strength and security of his first affections, allow himself to rest, as if the work were done. It is but begun. Let him settle within himself, deeply and sternly, the persuasion that it is to be going on while life lasts. For want of this it is that the love of so many has waxed cold, and that so many who put their hand to the plough have turned back. If you would persevere, you must understand, at the outset, the necessity of perseverance. You must start with the conviction that you begin a perpetual progress.

For which reason, instead of looking at the state of society, instead of conforming yourself to the model of those with whom you live, study into the nature and capacity of your soul, your destiny, and your responsibility ; imbue your mind with the spirit of your immortal faith, and the influence of the character of your holy Master ; and from the promptings of a soul thus filled and kindled, act out Christianity for yourself ; — not as others do, nor as others expect you

to do, but as this state of mind impels you. There is no true and safe course but to be obedient to these suggestions of a mind which has faithfully studied for itself into the doctrine and temper of the divine life. These suggestions are to it as the instinct of its immortal nature — as unerring, as safe, as the instincts of the lower orders of beings. Man's bodily instincts are as nothing, for his bodily interests are of little moment, and in pursuing them he has no need of an infallible guide. But the interests of his undying soul are of infinite consequence: in his search for them he needs an infallible guide; and that guide he has in the promptings of his own mind, whenever he has cultivated it with the deep study of truth and faith, and steeped it by faithful contemplation in the secrets of divine love and infinite purity, and brought it into intimate communion with the Holy Spirit of God. If you have truly acquainted yourself with your Master and his revelation, — if you have entered into their spirit with your whole soul, — then act yourself, freely, boldly, and you will not know what it is to stop short. This very action will be progress.

CHAPTER II.

ERRORS NOTICED AND CORRECTED — ESPECIALLY THE ERROR THAT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE IS NOT TO BE TAKEN UP EXPRESSLY — IS NOT TO HAVE A MARKED COMMENCEMENT.

BESIDES the causes of error which are hinted at in the preceding chapter, there are others still more worthy of consideration. Of these I do not know that there is any more common or more detrimental than that which is the subject of this chapter. It is an error which arises naturally from the circumstances of birth and education in a Christian land, and from the idea that under such circumstances the Christian character grows up of course, just as the social does, and perhaps as part of the social. It differs from that before mentioned in this, that, while that supposed the Christian character something to be formed by a certain process in a certain time, — to be done by the job and finished

at once, — this supposes that it is never any thing to be taken up as a distinct subject of attention, or to be made an express concern ; but is to be left to take care of itself, under those influences to which all are subjected, and beneath which it will grow up spontaneously. This is a common error ; it infects the great mass of nominal Christians ; it deceives and paralyzes even conscientious men, and keeps them from all progress by persuading them that the soul will grow of itself, as the body does.

This error is so widely connected with misapprehensions respecting the origin and nature of the religious life, that it cannot be fully developed without a wide discussion. But it is of less importance thoroughly to do this, than to exhibit the error itself. It has no doubt been fostered by the manner in which the axiom has been received, that all safe progress is gradual, that whatever is violent and sudden is unnatural and unsafe — an axiom true in itself, when rightly understood, but very falsely applied in the present instance. Is not the progress of the day gradual, it is asked, and the progress

of the seasons imperceptible? Does not the seed germinate and spring forth without our being able to detect or trace it; growing night and day, we know not how; first the blade, then the ear, and then the full corn in the ear? Are not all the beneficent operations of Providence and nature thus?—never rapid, vehement, instantaneous, but always gentle, quiet, gradual? And, satisfied with this analogy, we sit down to wait the advancement of our character, just as we wait the progress of the season; as if we had only to sit and wait; to do nothing to hasten or retard it; as if its course was onward as inevitably as fate. We do not perceive that we advance; but no matter: who sees the sun advance on the dial-plate? We have no consciousness of being in motion; but, then, who sees the motion of the planets, or the increase of the blade of corn? We are making no efforts: certainly not; for a growth, to be healthy, must not be forced. Who would have the sickly and short-lived produce of the hotbed?

But even if we chose to follow strictly the analogy between the insensible universe and

the living moral soul, this mode of reasoning is unjustifiable. If we do not see the day come forward with our eyes, we perceive clearly, after an interval, that it has come forward; and though our keenest sight does not detect the growth of the plant, we yet do see that it has grown; and we should be extremely unhappy if the opening dawn should become stationary, or the grain and fruit should pause in the process of ripening. But those of whom I speak feel no uneasiness at the perception that their characters have become stationary; they are not troubled when, at the greatest intervals, they still find that they have gained nothing. All is made quiet in their conscience at once by the sovereign pacifier, "O, we are not to expect great results: improvement must be gradual; the more gradual, the more sure."

Has not this lamentable result been encouraged in many minds by the expression of a very eminent writer of great influence? — "that our Christian congregations contain two classes: to the one must be preached conversion, to the other improvement" — an altogether just remark, which commends itself

at once to every man's approbation. But how easily misapplied! Every one, on hearing it, bethinks himself, of which class is he? "I do not need conversion; I have been religiously educated; always attended church, always read my Bible, always accounted myself a Christian; I only need improvement. My case, then, is safe; I am on the right side, and of course it will be for my interest to improve; in fact, considering the advantages amidst which I live, I cannot fail to improve: 'tis not in the nature of man to live under such excellent preaching and with such facilities for reading and worship, and yet not improve." Thus perfectly satisfied with his situation and with himself, he folds his arms and does nothing. The current floats him along, and he does not dream that it can be to any other than the true haven.

If I should address such persons, I would ask them if they do not presume too much, when they thus take it for granted that they do not need conversion. Does it by any means follow, because they have been educated under Christian institutions, that they have availed themselves of them, and become

Christians? Because they have been taught to read the Bible from their childhood, does it follow that the spirit of that holy book has formed their characters? Certainly this cannot be pretended. One may be brought up in the very recesses of the sanctuary, and yet be as corrupt as an abandoned heathen; may believe that Christianity is from heaven, as the Hindoo believes that his ancestral faith is divine, and be in heart addicted to all that is unchristian. History and observation tell of but too many who have contended for the faith, and yet who had checked no desire, controlled no passion, at its bidding. It is not, therefore, impossible that many decent men may have been brought up amongst us to honor Christianity, who yet are far from being imbued with its spirit; that many may have a respect for its precepts and a jealous attachment to its forms, and yet be governed at heart by principles which it would disapprove. Doubtless there are many such: they are willing to count themselves its friends; they are proud to number themselves among its supporters; and, being thus Christians by birth, claim the right to be esteemed

Christians indeed. But in order to be Christians indeed, they must be religious men; and religious men they are not: they need to be converted to the influence of the faith they honor; from the worldliness which governs them, to the personal experience of the power of the truth, which as yet is a dead letter to them. They think they need only to go on: alas! they have not yet begun. They have the very first step to take. They have the commencement to make.

Is it not to be feared that many are living and dying amongst us in this very condition? Is there not a quieting and deceptive influence in much of what passes for religious sentiment amongst us, producing the feeling that we have all begun — we have all entered the path of life — we have only to go on? But it is not true that all have begun. How, then, can it be otherwise than dangerous to entreat all to go on? How can they advance if they have not commenced? There can be no true and satisfactory progress unless we are sure that we have made a beginning, and a right beginning.

Now, the great error is, that men are con-

tent without any *proof* that they have made a beginning. They are willing to assume this important and all-essential fact as a thing of course.

They were born in a Christian land; they believe Christianity divine; they are pretty good men; they trust, through God's mercy, they shall be saved. But this does not prove that they have in any proper sense commenced the Christian life. What are their ruling principles? On what rest their affections? Where are their motives, desires, and to what are their self-sacrifices offered? Get an honest reply to these questions, and you find that *the world* still rules them. A faith in things spiritual, and a supreme surrender to God, they as yet know not. *They have a beginning yet to make.*

I hold it to be clear that no man can have done so important a thing as to resolutely take up the Christian law for his guide, without a consciousness afterwards that he has at some time distinctly done so. It is a very momentous act in a man's life when he assumes the obligations and responsibilities of the word of Christ, and says, "For this

Master I live and die." He must know that he has done it. It is not a thing to be taken for granted — to be supposed. The bearings of this faith on his daily life in a thousand ways — its applications to his temper, his thoughts, his will, his habits of living and speech — are too direct and palpable to leave any doubt on the subject. The struggle between this spirit of allegiance to conscience and faith, and the fleshly appetites and worldly principles; the trials, and falls, and recoveries, and shame, and joy, and all the various tumults of mind and heart, which the Christian pilgrimage implies, are all too distinct, too deeply felt, too strongly marked, to be forgotten, or to allow room for conjecture, supposition, or any testimony but the heart's own consciousness. Many, very many, have been so situated in early life, and have been so formed by influences exclusively of the world, that they can at no time come to a Christian life without most conspicuous and absolute change — a disruption of former ties, a more or less painful abandonment of former habits, a strange and entire alteration of the favorite and ruling desires. Educated

as most persons are, it is impossible that they should otherwise arrive at the Christian life; and this change is an era to be remembered. It leaves deep marks on the history. And as for others, who have been favored with a more propitious lot, and whose minds have received the sanctifying influence of truth from the cradle, drinking in divine knowledge with their daily discipline, and imbued with the temper of Heaven through the power of the society and teaching of their early guides, — they, too, cannot have confirmed their early impressions excepting through efforts and struggles; they must evidently *know*; it cannot be left to them to take for granted. They may have the most infallible proof that they have actually made a beginning.

But as for the great class of those who can produce neither of these proofs, how can they proceed? They are grossly self-deceived. Their trust and hope are altogether without foundation.

No wonder that they are content without progress. After assuming, without evidence, that they are Christians, it is a small thing to

add the assumption that they move while they stand still.

Here, therefore, I propose to my readers, that they institute a solemn and thorough self-examination. Let each inquire and know whether he is one of this very extensive class, who thus easily imagine themselves to be something when they are nothing. If he has never yet doubted on the subject, nor rigorously inquired, he has reason for apprehension. Let him dwell no longer in uncertainty, or content himself with conjecture. Let him ascertain whether he has actually made a religious beginning. If not, let him waste no time in studying how to make *advancement*. He has an earlier and more important work — to remove away all the heavy rubbish which, through his self-deception and long blindness, has been accumulating about him, and lay in earnest the foundation of a hearty faith, and a holy, heavenly character. If he is not sure that he has already begun the Christian life, let him begin now, to-day, with a prayerful determination, with a devoted purpose, with a heartfelt self-consecration to God, and Christ, and duty. Let him

leave this great matter no longer in suspense, this most momentous question no longer open, but let him bring his real character and his hidden motives into the light—the clear light of truth—by taking devoutly and resolutely the first grand step, by performing the initiatory act of intelligently, distinctly, and with a single heart, dedicating himself to the service of his heavenly Master.

CHAPTER III.

ERRORS NOTICED AND CORRECTED — ESPECIALLY THE ERROR OF THOSE WHO FANCY THAT THE CHRISTIAN LIFE MAY BE SUSTAINED WITHOUT THE USE OF MEANS.

I HAVE endeavored to expose the mistake of those who dream that the religious life has no beginning. I now turn to those who fancy that it may be sustained and supported without the use of means.

In stating their error thus, there is absurdity on its very face, so great that it may be supposed impossible for any one to maintain such a position. And perhaps to the full extent none will venture to maintain it in *terms*, though we certainly hear language which very nearly approaches the statement I have made, and daily witness conduct which is consistent with no other principle than that which such a statement involves. In fact, it is the tendency of the speculations and the practice of the day to make light of

forms, to undervalue modes of operation, to speak of times, persons, places, ceremonies, as unessential, material, instrumental, — as crutches for the lame, leading-strings for the weak, guides for babes, — quite necessary to those who are so far wedded to the body that it clogs and impedes their minds, but wholly unnecessary to the soul itself; in fact, as badges of an inferior condition, as marks of spiritual backwardness, as the remnants of an earthly dispensation, and relics of the infancy of our race, which are fast becoming unnecessary in this enlightened age, and which the truly enlightened had best dispense with at once.

There is a good deal of loose thinking and talking of this sort. It is founded on a misapprehension of the real nature of the advancement of man in the present world; as if cultivation and religion were making an actual change, not in his condition and advantages, but his very nature; relieving him of his dependence on the body, the senses, and the material world. Whereas, evidently, he must retain still his connection with them, his relation to them, and must be affected by

them in his desires, appetites, habits, enjoyments, character — must act through them, and be acted on by them; and so long as this is so, it is perfectly impossible that he should be able to maintain a purely spiritual existence, or to advance his spiritual character, without aid from abroad. While this connection with the outward world perpetually operates on him to affect his temper and distract his affections, it is necessary to counteract it by agents and contrivances which also operate outwardly. While, every day, appetite must be indulged at stated hours, business done, and exciting thoughts, interests, and passions absorb his mind, he must every day have stated means of neutralizing their engrossing and infecting power, or they will obtain the mastery.

How it may be when the soul shall be separated from its present connection with the body, we do not know. Perhaps then it may go on a course of holy progress without external aid, or stated help; though the Scriptures give no representations which warrant us to decide peremptorily that it is so. Certainly it is not so now; and they who fancy

it to be so, are taking the sure method to dwarf their own stature and chill their devout affections.

There is, undoubtedly, a distinction to be made between religion and the means of religion — a distinction, the want of attention to which has led to great abuses, and been the parent of fanaticism and superstition. Forms and ceremonies have been exaggerated into the essentials of faith; opinions have been made to take the place of character, and days and observances have usurped the respect which should have been paid to righteousness and true piety. In order to avoid this error of times past, it has become a favorite notion with many, that religion only, should have attention and honor — pure, unmixed, unaccompanied religion. They are to become religious; that is the great end; they are to form perfect characters. Religion does not consist in saying one's prayers, attending church, observing the Sabbath, sitting at the Lord's table, reading the Bible: these things are not religion. One may do all these, and yet not be religious — men have done all, scrupulously, and yet been reprobates. These

are but the means; and if one be but a religious man at heart, it is of no consequence whether he scrupulously observe these means or not. Indeed, he had best avoid any approach to a superstitious regard for them; it would belittle him; it is best to have a great deal of freedom. One should not be a slave to certain hours; he can pray at any time; a prayer is just as acceptable at the workbench, and in the street, as at the altar; and every day ought to be a Sabbath; one day has no more real sacredness than another. There is great danger of mistaking the means for the end; we will pursue the end only.

Common as something like this may be in the thoughts of many and the practice of more, it is yet wholly indefensible as a matter of reasoning, and utterly ruinous when applied to practice. Here and there a man may be found who can live on these principles uninjured; but they are extraordinary men; the great majority would infallibly be destroyed by them.

They lead to a disregard of religious services, which will extend, in too many instances, to a disregard of religion itself, and will

often inevitably cause the Christian character to fall into decay, because the props which are necessary to support it are removed. So serious an evil deserves to be carefully considered. There can be little hope of general advancement or great attainment in religion, when such opinions are prevalent.

Let it be considered, therefore, that although, abstractly and strictly speaking, there may be an essential distinction between an end to be gained and the means by which it is to be gained, for all practical purposes there is no difference whatever. If the result be desirable, and can be attained only through a certain process, that process is of precisely the same consequence as the result. If the affair be one of duty and obligation, the obligation to perform the process is as absolutely binding as the obligation to effect the result. If I desire to hold an eminent rank in society, if I wish to be a promoter of human good in an important profession, it is just as important that I should pass through the discipline of that preparatory education which fits for the profession, as it is that I should enter on that profession. My usefulness and eminence de-

pend equally upon both. It is not enough, in order to the arrival of a steamship at a distant city, that the crew be at their posts, the engineer at his wheel, and the machinery all in beautiful order; the boiler must be filled and the fire kindled; and he would be a stupid commander who should slight these because they are only means—who should say that his object was to arrive at the city, and he was not to be busying himself about these little preliminaries to progress. Yet it would be hard to understand how there is any less stupidity in those who fancy themselves able to arrive at heaven, while they slight the appointed means of proceeding thither as wholly secondary affairs. I ask, “Are you a student of the Scriptures? Do you daily and statedly pray? Are you fond of frequenting occasions of religious worship?” Your answer is, “O, no! religion does not consist in these things. I am only careful about the great end; that is all which I need to regard.” That is to say, so long as you are resolved to arrive safely at the end of your journey, it is of no consequence whether the water, and the wood, and the fire, be applied to the

boiler or not! “But,” I add, “one would imagine that your own feelings would prompt you to join in these religious observances and acts—that your own religious state of mind and heart would lead you to take pleasure in them.” “Why, yes, *sometimes*, now and then; and *then* it is well enough to attend and use them. But unless one happens to be *disposed* to engage in them, it is not worth while to do so. It is only the great end which I am anxious about.” “And thus,” I reply, “caring only for the *accomplishment* of your voyage, you have no rule but your *inclinations* to decide when you shall *feed the fire* which is to carry you on.”

One would be glad to ask of the great men who have blessed the world with their light and action in any department of usefulness—especially one would like to ask of the apostles and reformers—how this doctrine would have operated in their case, and where the world would have been if they had been beguiled by it—if Paul, instead of his journeyings and toils that he might preach the gospel, and establish and organize churches, and so save men’s souls and extend the king-

dom of Christ in the world, had thought within himself, "Preaching, and worship, and the Christian community, are only the means of salvation; they are but secondary things in comparison with salvation: salvation, salvation, that is the great, prime, all-absorbing consideration; and why should I be wearing out my life on the mere means?" — or if Luther and the other men that have moved the world with their doctrine had sat silent on the happy suggestion that *preaching is not religion* — RELIGION is the great thing to be regarded? And yet, where is the man who can show that it would have been more absurd in *them* thus to have forsaken the preaching of the gospel, and the gathering of assemblies, than it is in any private man to forsake the hearing of the word on the same pretence?

And yet there are men who practise and defend this unspeakable absurdity! They think themselves good Christians, and yet waste the hours of the Sabbath, are slack in their attendance on public worship, almost strangers to the Bible, without worship in their families, and without stated prayer in

their closets; and, if you expostulate with them, very soberly reply, that these things do not constitute religion; they care only for religion itself. And thus there is not one of the means appointed for and essential to religious establishment and growth which is not put by on this plea.

It is evident enough, I think, that these means, if not parts of religion, are yet essential to it. But I go still farther. I ask if it be so unquestionable, as appears to be taken for granted, that they are *not parts of religion*. Is it so clear that the reading of the Scriptures, acts of devotion, and attendance on the ordinances, are not essentially, and in their own nature, parts of religion as well as means? Let us look at this. What is religion? Strictly speaking, it is something invisible, intangible, immaterial — which has no shape, and is not cognizable by any human sense. Practically speaking, it is a certain character — that state of mind, heart, and character, which become the relation in which a man stands to God. Now, I ask, what is that state of mind, heart, or character, without the expression of it? Is not the ex-

pression of it, properly speaking, a part of it? Can we say that there is character where there is no manifestation of it? If we were consulting philosophical exactness of terms perhaps this might be disputed; but so far as regards real life and the common judgment of men, it is doubtless correct. We know nothing of real benevolence of heart, if in no way manifested — nothing of uprightness and strength of character — nothing of intellectual power — except so far as *expressed*; and this expression is always regarded as part of the character itself; it is the character acting.

Now, religion is a certain state of mind, heart, and character; but if there be no manifestation of this state in action, neither the individual himself nor other men could be assured of its existence and reality. But what are the expressions, what the manifestations, of religion? The most natural, perhaps the most spontaneous, the most indubitable, is prayer. It is the *expression* of the religious heart to its God. It is the language of the devout mind. It is the action of the pious spirit. I cannot conceive, therefore, that any

one should esteem prayer simply a *means* of religion. It is a part of religion. It is an inalienable concomitant. And it is represented, throughout the Scriptures, more frequently as an essential act of religion, — inseparable from and inherent in a devout character, — than as a means of increasing the devotional temper, or of spiritual improvement.

The same is true concerning the Christian ordinances. To express faith and newness of spirit by baptism, and to commune with the Savior at his table, are in themselves religious actions. To read the Scriptures, and devoutly meditate on the truth of God, and worship in his house, and listen to the preaching of his word, are religious acts, expressions of a religious character, no less than means of increasing in Christian knowledge and holiness.

It is, therefore, far from true that, in neglecting religious observances, we merely postpone the means to the end. They constitute, in their very nature, parts of that which we seek to achieve. They are natural *expressions, manifestations*, of the religious charac-

ter; and one can hardly be authorized in imagining himself to possess that character, if it do not thus display itself.

If it be still said that one may make his selection from these means, and use those which best suit his own case and satisfy his own want, it may be replied, Undoubtedly he may find greater edification in some than in others, and to such he may with peculiar interest apply. But he can hardly think himself at liberty to *slight any*, so long as all have been appointed by God, and are regarded as part of man's service to him; so long, too, as each of them is only another mode of giving expression to that spirit which he professes to desire to cultivate, and which he ought to find pleasure in expressing.

If these things be so, every man's duty becomes plain, and he can live in neglect of it only at the hazard of a great absurdity, which casts his soul into fearful peril.

CHAPTER IV.

THE YOUNG CHRISTIAN PUT ON HIS GUARD AGAINST THE HINDERANCE TO PROGRESS WHICH ARISES FROM DISAPPOINTMENT RESPECTING THE ENJOYMENT OF A RELIGIOUS LIFE.

AMONG the hinderances against which the young Christian may need to be put on his guard, we may mention, next, that arising from false expectations respecting the enjoyment of a religious life. The opening views of a religious existence are like those of youth, bright with vague anticipations of the future, full of gay dreams, romantic and visionary expectations. It is the youth of the soul, excited, ardent, confident, and painting the future in colors too uniformly gorgeous to be true. Not that any extravagance of expectation can exceed the actual happiness which the Christian realizes in his established faith. Young Christians do not, for they cannot, expect too much; but they ex-

pect — as the Scripture says “they ask — *amiss.*” They err as to the nature more than as to the degree of enjoyment. They look for it in excitement, in strong emotion, in ecstasy, in rapture. They expect to be forever in the same glowing frame of bliss in which they are now, while the subject is all new and their feelings all fresh. The scales have just fallen from their eyes, the light has broken in upon their souls for the first time, and the scene that bursts upon their view is that of Elysium. They have no idea that familiarity can ever render it less beautiful, or dull in any degree the emotion with which they gaze upon it. But it is a universal and inexorable law of nature, that familiarity tames the passionateness with which any object is regarded. The excitement of feeling goes down. The exaltation and frenzy of the mind subside. The pleasure may continue, but the rapture ceases.

He, therefore, who proceeds to cultivate his religious nature under the expectation that it is to yield him a perpetual, sensible joy, is sure to be disappointed. It is not the nature of the mind to be capable of perpet-

ual, unintermitted joy. In all cases in which the mind is wrought up to a high pitch of excitement, one of two consequences always results — either it becomes weary, and the interest of the subject is worn out by the intenseness of the action, — and this often happens in religion, where a most passionate devotion for a season ends in coldness, indifference, and worldliness, — or else, the excitement being modified and controlled by reason and principle, the mind settles down into a quiet, steadfast, gentle, and equable condition, without ecstasy, but full of content. And this, too, is what we see in daily examples of the judicious and confirmed believers.

Many are made greatly unhappy, and fall into grievous despondency, for want of duly considering this. They find ere long that their frame of mind sinks. Not only have they no rapture, but they perceive with horror that occasionally even a lethargy of feeling comes over them, as if they had fairly exhausted the excitability of their mind. They read and pray with a calmness which frightens them — a calmness they in vain try to agitate; and whereas they were shortly before

lifted to the third heavens with delight, they now stand unmoved, as if the very pulse of celestial life had stopped. The contrast appals them. They fancy themselves deserted of God and all goodness. They feel themselves abandoned and lost, and are ready to sink in consternation and despair. They had imagined, in their hours of exalted musing, that the love of the world was subdued; that the power of its fascination was gone; that its follies and lusts, its pride and pleasures, having been seen once in their true light, could never have charms for them again; and that the sinful feelings they had formerly excited could not be excited by them again. But, as they again move about in the actual scenes of the world, they find it far otherwise. The desires and appetites which they supposed to be dead, were only sleeping, and they suddenly wake. The passions and selfishness which they supposed subdued spring up vigorously, and would break their chains, and clamor for indulgence, as before, and, perhaps, in some unguarded moment, seize on their gratification. All this astonishes and alarms them. They were not prepared

for it. It is wholly unexpected. They find themselves deceived. They know not how to meet it. They are miserable. Their life is wholly a different one from that which they proposed to themselves — a life of watching, self-denial, and anxiety, when they had been looking for nothing but peace and joy. They are disheartened, and perhaps abandon the path which promised them pleasantness and peace, but has yielded them weariness and pain.

It becomes important, therefore, that the beginner should understand the nature both of Christian duty and of Christian happiness, that he may count the cost before he begins, and not fail through false and unreasonable expectations.

Let him consider, then, that Christian duty is conformity to a law, and Christian happiness the result of that conformity. This law governs the affections, as well as the conduct; determines the whole state of mind and feeling, as well as of life; and it is only when mind and feeling are conformed to this law that the man is in the way of Christian duty, — only then, therefore, that he is to expect

happiness. And what happiness? That which belongs to the consciousness of having done duty ; that which grows out of and appertains to the state of mind which is attained ;— and that will be, of course, satisfaction, contentment, rather than ecstasy. The consciousness of being right, the assurance of the favor of God, — these, being abiding and habitual impressions on the mind, are likely to produce a calm peace, rather than a tumultuous delight.

Then it is to be considered, further, that religion operates on the human mind upon similar principles with other subjects, and follows the laws and constitution of human nature. If, then, in respect to the question before us, the analogy of the other affections shows the same result, we ought to be satisfied. And undoubtedly it is so. The religious affections are kindred to all the affections. That love which is the essence of religion is the same love which exhibits itself in the various relations of man, and is the source of the purest and strongest joys of earth, as it is to be of those of heaven. How intense and fervent the love of a mother for

her child ! What sacrifices will she make for it, what toils endure, and how readily does her heart flutter and her eye overflow ! Yet there are times when that strong affection seems dead in her bosom, and we have often heard her say that it seemed to her as if she had no feeling, as if she were an unnatural creature, from whom all natural affection had departed. Yet, meantime, unexcited as she is, she goes resolutely on, discharging her maternal duties, till some occasion calls forth again the floods of tenderness. She did not blame herself—we did not blame her—for that habitual tranquillity of feeling, for that temporary coldness;—far from it. The cares of a large family never could go on, if the parent were agitated always with the intense feeling toward all the children which is the real measure of her love for each ; and we know that she gives as genuine proof of her affection where the work she does for them takes her thoughts away from them, when she forgets them for a season, because she is so busy for their good, as when she overwhelms them with caresses and tears.

So, too, the father of the household. He leaves them in the morning, is absorbed with the toilsome cares of his business, and may not be distinctly conscious of a thought or emotion going back to them during the day. Is it proved, then, that he does not love them? Time was, when the image of her who is now the mother of his children haunted him like a dream, mingled with all his thoughts, could not be, would not be, banished from his mind: it was like a light about him wherever he went, and a bliss in his thoughts however he was employed; and thus his love was one perpetual living rapture. Because it is so no longer, does he therefore love her the less? Nay, he loves her the more, — with a sober, steadfast, habitual confidence and affection, which has lost its passion, but has become an essential portion of his being, — intrudes on him less, but in its calmness and quietness blesses him more. It is only the idle dream of romance which expects the rapture of the lover to be perpetuated in the sober certainty of waking bliss which makes the happiness of home. And so of all the affections. The religious affec-

tions go by the same law. When newly awakened and fixed on the great realities of God and eternity, they engross, and agitate, and absorb the soul; there is no room for any other thought, affection, or care; these fill and consume the whole being. But by-and-by the heart settles into a state of tranquillity; and the man, occupied in obedience and duty, is excited less, and walks with his faith as an old and familiar friend.

Let it, then, be no discouragement to the religious aspirant, that familiarity with his new life has abstracted something from the keen relish it had at first. Let him learn to find an equal satisfaction in the moderate and unexciting life of tranquil duty, that he at first found in the strong emotions of the mind. Acceptance with God depends on the heart being right with him; and as you do not judge of the rightness of your child's affection toward yourself and the other children by its vehemence of expression, by its being easily called out in tears and vented in outcries, but rather by its steady and unobtrusive watchfulness for your wishes, and carefulness not to offend, and fidelity, and kindness,—

so believe that the great Father judges of you, and approves you none the less because the strength of emotion with which you first came to him has subsided into an equable confidence and uniform obedience.

And here I cannot refrain from saying a few words in relation to another source of discouragement, which often operates in connection with that, to the consideration of which this chapter is especially devoted.

The Christian is very frequently disheartened, not only at finding less excitement and rapturous enjoyment in the religious life than he expected, but also at not discovering such obvious marks of progress in the advancing stages as at the commencement. But it is a very important truth for him who is going forward in the Christian life to remember, that the growth of character follows, in many respects, the analogy of all other growth. In its beginnings it is more perceptible ; its progress in its first stages is more striking : an extraordinary difference is in a very short time noticed, after a man has positively changed from worldliness to religion. But the succeeding steps become by-and-by less percep-

tible ; and though actual, perhaps equal progress may be made in a more advanced state of the Christian course, yet the work may seem to be almost stationary. An illustration of this may be found in the different appearances of motion in the rising and the meridian sun ; the former seeming to advance with rapidity, the latter hardly to move. Or take, for comparison, a work of art, a painting. The artist takes a blank and unmeaning canvass. He sketches the outlines of his beautiful subject. A very short time suffices to exhibit great progress. The whole form and features come rapidly into view. But, as he approaches towards the finishing of his work, he labors the more delicate parts — he retouches, refines, perfects ; but it all makes little show : in truth, there may be more and more careful study, and anxious toil, and the highest efforts of his genius, and yet the amount of labor and thought, and the degree of improvement, be perceptible to none but a most observing and practised eye. So it is with the Christian character the nearer it approaches to perfection : there may be great watchfulness, laborious self-discipline, toil for

advancement, and a perpetual addition of those delicate strokes, those hues and shades of spiritual beauty, by which perfection is attained; but no change shows itself, meanwhile, to the common observer; the Christian seems to others precisely where he was a month ago, and he himself may be dissatisfied at not perceiving any obvious marks of growth corresponding with his arduous labors.

Let the Christian, then, not be deceived. Let him be sure that he judges himself by a right standard. It is true that he ought not to be too easily satisfied of his improvement; but neither ought he to be discouraged through an irrational regard and judgment of his moral condition. When the oak was just springing from the ground, and rearing its stem in the increase of its first tender season, its growth of but twelve inches above the soil, whereon nothing but decayed leaves was manifest before, appeared conspicuous and considerable; but now that it has waved its branches in the sunshine and winds of three-score summers, and sheltered two generations of men with its beneficent shadow, and nurtured innumerable tribes of living crea-

tures in its kindly arms, it may add the same measure of increase in a year to each of its hundred gigantic limbs, with no perceptible enlargement; its real growth has been a hundred-fold what it was when most conspicuous to men, but no one observes or appreciates it. So it is with the Christian character: the more advanced its stages, the nearer it attains to perfection, its actual improvement, though greater than in the beginning, may nevertheless be less perceptible.

In view of the discouragements alluded to in this chapter, and of all others that might be enumerated, I would say to him who has really entered on a religious life, "You have taken the only rational course, the only safe course, the only truly happy course: persevere unto the end; run with patience the race that is set before you; fight the good fight, keep the faith, lay hold on eternal life. Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart."

CHAPTER V.

CONSIDERATIONS DESIGNED TO ASSIST THE
CHRISTIAN IN THE SUCCESSFUL USE OF
THE MEANS AND METHODS OF RELIGIOUS
PROGRESS.

IN order to the successful use of the means of religious progress, so that they shall truly operate to a religious growth, it is essential so to employ them as to create an equal, healthy development of the character in all its parts, so as to avoid the inconsistency and distortion which are the consequence of too exclusive devotion to some, and the comparative neglect of others. A perfectly well proportioned religious character is rarely to be found; but for that very reason it should be the more anxiously desired.

Character is constituted of the state of the mind and affections, and the habits of life. These ought all to be in harmony with each other,—directed by the same principles, exhibiting the same features, wearing

the same complexion. If they disagree, there is a painful discordance perceived; something is wrong; there is neglect of duty, blame somewhere.

Now, the means of cultivating and perfecting the right state of mind and affections are, primarily, meditation and prayer, and those mental exercises of contemplation, self-examination and study, by which the soul is directly wrought upon and raised to a spiritual fervor. Thus it approaches to God, cherishes holy and benevolent desires, and comes to love and enjoy the things that are unseen and eternal. And when, from the seasons of contemplation and thought, the man goes into the scenes of active life, he carries with him this propensity to goodness, these desires to do well. He goes with a mind imbued with the sentiment of devotion, and the spirit of dutifulness.

Thus far, well. But the character is not yet complete: the habits of his active life make part of it. And what are they? Do they correspond with this internal frame? Are they in harmony with these principles and sentiments?

We are ready at first to ask, "How can they be otherwise?" But we are soon reminded that it is often even so. It is common to witness lamentable inconsistencies between the feelings and the conduct. Some men appear to live two lives. They seem to have two souls. In private thought and in familiar converse they are devout men. Their sensibilities are quick; their emotions are strong; their sense of God lively; and they greatly enjoy their seasons of devotion and reading. But in the routine of life they are worldly, grasping, self-indulgent, devoted to gain, neglectful of trusts and duties, and far inferior to many who have no religious sensibility, who find little enjoyment in retirement and reflection, but who have accustomed themselves to the most scrupulous fidelity in every passing hour of social life.

It is to be with you, therefore, a matter of study and effort to carry the sentiment of the closet into action. The life of contemplation must not contradict the life of action. It is but partially that character is formed which is formed only by thinking, musing, and purposing. It wants the completeness of

active habits. It wants the test which is to be found only in life. It wants the principle of growth which can be found only in action. And this is what is particularly to be considered in this connection — *action is an essential and all-important means of religious growth*; so much so, that even the contemplative graces, the virtues of the mind, true affection, exalted principle, benevolent dispositions, — which we are ready to believe thrive best in solitude; to cultivate which, multitudes have shut themselves out from the world, that they might have nothing to do but to meditate, read, and pray, — even these fail of their true perfection unless quickened and ripened by action. For consider a moment. When the mind is thus excited and glowing with divine truth and virtuous thoughts, is it not all so much impulse to do something? Does not the desire spring up spontaneously, prompting to act, — that is, to express itself? But there is no opportunity to act, and the impulse is denied. It is excited again, and again denied. What is the consequence? It is enfeebled. It becomes less and less strong. It fades and dies from the soul.

Generous impulses, not acted upon, perish; the soul loses its sensibility, becomes callous. It has long been a familiar accusation against a certain sort of sentimental reading, that it tends to consume and waste the sympathies, and paralyze the affections, by highly exciting them, but allows them not expression in action, awakening the impulse, but refusing to gratify it. It is equally the case with all religious affections. And it is easy to understand how they who trust to them as if sufficient, and take no pains to carry them out in act, may come to exhibit two distinct characters — elevated thought and glowing feeling, but selfish indolence of life and cold inactivity.

Consider, therefore, that action is an essential means of religious growth. Follow out the highest impulses of your mind. Obey the suggestions of your conscience. Never deny the religious promptings of your feelings. Then you will establish the dominion of principle, the supremacy of conscience. Then all good feelings, having received their natural and intended gratification, will be

encouraged and strengthened, because they have had their legitimate exercise.

Remarks to the same purpose may be made respecting the relation which subsists between *principle* and *habit*. Habit is a thing of tremendous power: it is sometimes omnipotent in man; and it is of the greatest consequence that its energies be as much as possible, and as easily as possible, secured on the side of virtue. It may be the greatest helper or the greatest hinderance to improvement. It was intended to be the former; and yet to how many, through life, does it prove the latter! In how many men does virtue make toilsome growth, because clogged, thwarted, depressed, by unfortunate habits! — habits formed in early life, established in the flesh, rooted in the affections, woven into the daily routine of conduct, till they become a part of the very nature; and the poor wretch whom they enthrall is bound down to a miserable insignificance of character, and yet is wholly unaware of their deleterious predominance. They are habits, for example, of luxurious living, of perpetual personal indul-

gence, of slothfulness, of mental inaction; they are around him like a heavy and deadening atmosphere, through which his spirit has to make its way upward, and by which its flight is perpetually retarded. It has always been so, and he does not know it; or, if he knows it, how difficult to enforce the remedy! But in most instances he has no conception of the true nature of the evil which hinders him; is not, perhaps, even aware of his grievous want of alacrity and progress — like the perpetual invalid, who has borne about with him from time immemorial a seated disorder which enfeebles him, but has no violent symptoms, and who still engages in all the general duties of life, without the vigor and delight that other men know, but with all the vigor and delight that he ever knew, and therefore without any consciousness of the extent of his own deficiency; and who never can be conscious how far he is below the vigor and spirits of other men, except by being delivered from his ailment and made like other men. So is it with him whose moral power is palsied by the unpropitious habits I have referred to: he never can know the degree

in which they are an injury to him, until, having thrown them off, he sees how rapidly he rises without them.

There is the greatest reason, then, that one should strictly examine himself in this respect; that he may not be depressed forever by circumstances in his modes of life, of whose injurious influence he is ignorant, and which he might counteract if he knew them.

But could he counteract them? It will not do to answer, No; and yet the difficulty is in many cases so all but insuperable, that we are ready to understand in their literal sense the words of the prophet, and believe that the undertaking is as desperately hopeless as that of changing the leopard's spots, and the Ethiopian's skin. To take the most familiar example: there is the drunkard. He continues such against his own will, in spite of his own resolutions, in contradiction to his own interest, tears, professions, purposes, principles. His bad habit is but the type of all bad habits; a little more desperate, perhaps, because it has worked itself into every fibre of the body, and made its gratification to be clamored for by every organ and function,

every muscle, sense, and nerve; but all bad habits, in their place, exercise the same insane dominion. Sloth — is not the man ashamed of it? does he not make vows against it? does he not mourn at the ruin and disgrace it entails upon him? and yet he is slothful still. Ill-temper — does not the passionate mother, whose bursts of anger lead her to ill-treat the child that she loves, blush at her own shame, and condemn herself with bitterness and tears? and yet to-morrow the passion is her master again. Procrastination — with what keen anguish, with what abiding sense of degradation, with what remorse for friends neglected, duties omitted, precious opportunities of usefulness passed by, and occasions of honor and improvement lost forever, — with what compunction and self-condemnation, with what torment of unintermitting self-dissatisfaction, — does that inexplicable habit pursue its poor deluded victim! And yet remorse and shame, and a thousand injurious results, and the appeal even of sober principle, are vain. He still submits to his master, and will be wiser *to-morrow*. Other instances any one can add. And they sug-

gest the fearful question, which almost staggers our hope as we reply to it — whether, in sober truth, a confirmed ill habit be not incurable, and whether virtue have any prospect of gaining in the conflict.

The best answer is found in the appeal to opposite facts. The worst habits in the most desperate cases, and under the most unpromising circumstances, have been corrected. The history of the Christian religion is filled with examples. It has shown its divine power in these triumphs, and proved, by the wonderful trophies of its grace, in the amazing conversions from sin which it has wrought, that however desperate may seem to be the struggle between principle and habit, yet the good is the stronger, and must prevail in the end, whenever it is faithfully and perseveringly supported.

But how much faith and what long perseverance it demands!

From these extreme cases, then, the Christian, who is seeking improvement, must take both a warning and encouragement — a *warning* that he examine his condition, and be fully acquainted with every circumstance in

his modes of life which threatens this ruinous ascendancy over his principle; and an *encouragement* that, if he detect any which is interwoven with his whole being, so that to part with it is like parting with a right hand or right eye, he yet *is able to do it*, and to enjoy the happiness of deliverance.

He is especially to learn the great duty of seeing to it, from the first, that all his personal and social habits, his disposition of time, the order of his affairs, the customs of his daily life and business, be such as to facilitate his virtuous purposes, — such as to make devotion and religion easy to him, — such as to make holy thoughts and benevolent actions always in place, never incongruous, never irksome, because evidently *in the way* of other affairs. By this method, he should give to goodness the fairest chance of obtaining a complete ascendancy over him. Principle, finding all the habits of life and mind congenial, would thrive, and strengthen, and assume the complete mastery.

To make this yet the more sure, let him take pains directly to aid and encourage his principle; not only by bringing it forward and

making it active on great emergencies, but by allowing it, nay, calling on it, to exert itself constantly; giving it small tasks; cheering it by the pleasure of small triumphs; and, in a word, by making even those lesser offices of duty and kindness, — which other men do of course, and without thinking, — by making even them matters of principle, — turning them into thoughtful acts of religious obedience, doing them because they are consonant to faith, and are suitable to a spiritual and holy nature — whether he eats or drinks, or whatever he does, doing all to the glory of God, as to the Lord, and not to men. In this way, the full power of habit and all its noblest energies may be enlisted on the side of his improvement. Because, principle being often called into action, and being made the supreme deciding authority, more frequently than any thing else, the habit of acting from principle will become stronger than any other habit; will overcome, suppress, exclude every hostile habit: the opposition between principle and habit, which once so palsied the purpose and neutralized the efforts of virtue, will have ceased; and the forces once antago-

nistic having become united in the alliance of truth, having become in fact *one*, there can be no longer any serious impediment to the onward progress of the soul. *Being made free from sin, ye will become servants to God, and have your fruit unto holiness.*

CHAPTER VI.

MAXIMS ON WHICH THE EXPECTATION OF RELIGIOUS PROGRESS IS TO BE BUILT.

LET us suppose that the low views and the erroneous principles on which the Christian life is too frequently made to proceed are set aside. We next go on to state the maxims on which the expectation of Christian progress must be built.

And, first of all, it is evident that *there must be a beginning*. There is no such thing as setting out in the midst. There is a first step in every journey; there is the commencement of life in every germ. The religious life of the soul can form no exception: it must have a first step, a commencement. Define it as you please, — let it be the act of the human reason alone, — let it be the moral character as exhibited in daily life, — let it have no authority or guide but the individual judgment and will; still there must be a beginning somewhere, for the simple reason

that the individual who exercises the judgment and will has a beginning; so that no one, by adopting a low idea of the nature of the religious life, can thereby escape the obligation to ascertain whether he have started on the true career, nor assume that he came into it as a matter of course when he came into the world. For into what did he then come? Into those very habits of decent living which, in his view, are the Christian life? Surely not. Those habits were formed at a time when he had power to form the opposite habits; when he had the opportunity to decide for himself which he would adopt; and when, from some motive or other, he did adopt the better rather than the worse. If he claims that these should satisfy his conscience, then he must be able to show that he adopted them of good intention, that he formed the purpose to possess and maintain this character. Either he formed the purpose, or he did not form it: if he never formed the purpose, but is what he is by pure accident, then, of course, he will not pretend to any more *virtue*, than if, by a similar accident, he had become any other character; and, on the

other hand, if he formed the purpose and pursued it by resolute forethought and plan, then he made a beginning. Therefore, nothing can be more absurd than the idea so commonly and unthinkingly held by men, that they are in the midst of their religious progress, when they never formed a distinct intention of pursuing it, and cannot prove that they ever laid an express plan in relation to it.

Now, if this be true in regard to that low idea of the Christian life just referred to, how much more is it true of that correct and elevated idea which rises beyond the decencies of external morals, to the spiritual purity of the affections, companionship with Christ, and a universal holiness. This absolute and express devotion to things invisible and eternal, this perpetual and supreme reference to the spiritual, is not a state of mind which grows up spontaneously, which starts to being of itself, out of the incumbrances and occupations of this visible state ; — it must be the result of effort, the effect of design. No man can have thus gained the mastery over the sensible present without having intended it and labored for it : he could not *do this* with-

out fixing a mark on that era of his life; without being able to go back and say that *then* he made a beginning; not perhaps at such a day or hour, or even absolutely such a year; but certainly that at such a period of life he took a decided stand, and, by some process of mind more or less protracted, came to the express understanding with himself that he was bound by religious obligations.

This is the first element in the religious life — this settled purpose of soul, this distinct, acknowledged, cherished intention and plan to live for heaven. He that cannot convict himself of having deliberately formed such a purpose, who is not conscious of having meditated and acted upon such a plan, talks idly when he asserts that he is in the midst of a Christian course. He deceives himself. He wants the first element of the religious life.

Next to this purpose, religious progress demands *effort*. The purpose must not die in inaction; it must not, as, alas! is too frequently the case, waste itself in reverie and musing. That dreamy state of the mind, which loves to dwell in contemplation, — to

sit with the eyes half closed and gaze on the visions of glory which the fancy brings before it, — to think of the admirable things that may be done, and the grand designs which it would be delightful to accomplish, — is an unprofitable state, and does little to advance the character. It is likely to enervate rather than to improve it. No purpose is of any value which does not ripen into action; and the ever-present purpose of Christian progress is nought, unless accompanied by ever-active effort.

Inaction is the death of all virtue, the palsy of the character. It accounts satisfactorily for the backwardness and meanness of Christian men in Christian attainments. One might almost fancy, from the sluggishness with which men hold their faith, that, in adopting the gospel as their hope and rule, they had simply placed themselves on board some convenient vessel sent for their deliverance, and now were quietly to float down the gentle stream to the great city of their rest; instead of which, all experience and all revelation teach them, that they are embarked on a wide and perilous ocean, where they

must watch and toil, and where they can make no progress except they make effort.

Our infatuation on this point is dreadful. Nothing else comes without labor and perseverance. Learning, accomplishments, distinction, wealth,—they are all earned; and no man who desires them hesitates to pay for them the full price, enormous as it sometimes is, at which alone they can be possessed. But that greatest and highest attainment, a perfect human character, is to come of itself. The calm peace of self-government,—the holy luxury of heavenly-mindedness—the lofty and complacent dignity of spiritualized affections—the honor of being like God, and glory of entering with Jesus Christ into immortal purity and love,—this we expect to obtain by wishing: this vast acquisition, this unlimited and illimitable boon, we look at, we admire, we long for, we do not doubt we shall possess; and yet we make for it nothing like the effort which we make to get bread for our children and ornaments to our houses.

No wonder, then, that the Christian community improves so slowly. No wonder that

exemplary patterns of Christian attainment are so rare. No wonder that, instead of seeing all around us those men of the beatitudes, those partakers of the divine nature, those illustrious imitators of God, of whom the New Testament speaks, and whom Christ meant to fashion as his peculiar people, we are compelled to mourn over inconsistency and frailty — compelled to hide a multitude of sins in our good men with the mantle of a wide charity — compelled to extenuate and apologize for our own and our brethren's faults, on the score of that human imperfection, which it is our shame that we have not long ago surmounted and repressed. No wonder that, in this laxness of exertion toward Christian perfection, the world still waits to comprehend the meaning of that description which speaks of a "royal priesthood," "sons of God," "perfect men in Christ Jesus." For where are they? Here and there one, just to satisfy us that the Word of God describes no impossibility — just enough to cast unspeakable reproach and shame on the indolence of the backward multitude of believers,

— backward, because they make no true effort to go forward.

But it is not this listlessness and inaction alone, to which we are to look as the cause of this imperfect measure of Christian attainment amongst us; — much is to be imputed also to *a certain vagueness in respect to the nature and order of Christian progress*. Men do not distinctly perceive what it is, nor how it should proceed. The same inaccurate and cloudy notions already adverted to, which persuade them that they are in the successful prosecution of a work they have never expressly begun, nor formed any express purpose of doing, lead them also to believe that it will be, by-and-by, successfully completed in some general way; but they have not described to themselves in what way it is to be. They indistinctly see they must go forward; but they have no clear, accurate idea of the path, and no idea whatever of the stages by which they are to proceed. In a word, their notion of the whole subject is general and confused, amounting to nothing more than that they are to be improving themselves and advancing toward heaven; that they are to

grow better as they grow older ; — but as to analyzing this idea, and reaching an actual understanding of the several points in regard to which they are to grow better, — this is foreign from their thought ; and no wonder that this vagueness of purpose keeps them stationary.

The next point, therefore, to be considered is, that *religious progress is to be made by stages*. It is not merely proceeding, but proceeding from one point to another. It is not merely becoming better, but becoming better first in one respect and then in another.

All progress is from stage to stage. In the processes of nature it is so ; — first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear ; — a continued growth, but arriving at and passing certain *epochs* or *periods* as it proceeds. So in the growth of the human frame, and of the human mind ; so in the advancement of society and knowledge. No science can be taught, no art can be learned, except in passing from step to step ; one portion must be acquired first as a preparation for another, and the third can be reached only through the full comprehension of the second.

Why should religious knowledge and Christian character be exceptions? Why should we not expect in their pursuit also to find natural steps of advancement, which invite us to aim at one attainment in the first place, and to make that a stepping-stone for the next? And if our religious progress were divided out for us into portions, would not its accomplishment be more certain and more satisfactory?

It may not be easy—indeed, it is very difficult—to state distinctly and with philosophical exactness the successive stages of the religious progress; and for this reason, among others, that they cannot be precisely the same to all men. Even the author of that celebrated description of the Christian life which depicts the Pilgrim's Progress, though of a class of believers who have gone as far as any in making Christian experience of the same undeviating type in all individuals—has yet found it necessary to allow great varieties in the several histories which he framed. Greater varieties still will be allowed by most persons who consider carefully the infinite diversities which exist in the natural

tempers and dispositions of men, and the circumstances of education, society, business, companions, forms of life, &c. in which men are placed. It is inevitable that, under this state of things, no minute account can be given of the stages of Christian progress which will precisely apply to all persons. We can state nothing more than a few general principles, of whose varying application every man must judge for himself.

Thus we may say, first, this culture of character which you have undertaken is a vast and complicated thing: it is not one thing, but many; and it demands equal watchfulness and effort in many directions, as to the thoughts, the passions, the words, the actions. It demands right affections toward all objects that concern you in this world, and in the invisible world; the proper balance of the affections; the due adjustment of the habits with the principle; the true combination of freedom and restraint, of contemplation with action, of firmness with gentleness. It demands knowledge, self-restraint, watchfulness, and action, in so many directions, on so many subjects, and so uniinter-

mittingly, that to undertake the whole at once, to assume the equal charge of all, and attempt their faithful regulation at the same moment, is a task that might well seem desperate. The work must be divided and classified; the field must be separated into portions; special attention must be first bestowed on this, and then on that, and the huge labor be facilitated by partition, the long journey accomplished by stages.

Then, secondly, as respects the precise order in which the several objects shall be taken up and accomplished, it is clear that the first care should be to establish the dominion of some great leading principle in the soul, some one master authority, to whose pervading influence all shall submit, and from whose absolute word there shall be no appeal. This will be to lay the foundation of the character steadfast and strong, and to further and facilitate the unity and compactness of the whole structure. And the Creator has provided for this in the very constitution he has framed, by making conscience the supreme power, and ordaining that every faculty and disposition shall bow to its sway. *To*

assure to conscience its rightful sovereignty is, therefore, the first object; to this one great end the attention should be directed and the chief effort made, because, until conscience sits monarch in the soul, all effort after permanent moral advancement must be vain; and afterward none can be lost; and in the mean time, while this is going on, much discipline of the heart and the life will be unconsciously accomplished which otherwise might demand serious labor. Let the vigor of the soul, then, be concentrated to the accomplishment of this result, rather than dissipated and enfeebled in the attempt to perform several acts of inferior moment.

Having made some progress in this great work, there is another distinct object which may in the same way command the special attention of the soul, and be made matter of studious and almost exclusive consideration—the *predominant affection*, namely. This is of not inferior consequence to that just mentioned. That to which the heart is devoted decides the character; and if the character is matter of solicitude, especially is it matter of solicitude to decide what shall

be mistress of the heart. Here the case is plain. LOVE is the first and second thing; love is the fulfilling of the law; he that dwells in love dwells in God. This is the principle that must sway the affections: when it does, the law will be fulfilled, and the soul will dwell with God, without any minute and painful toiling after the petty details of duty. Let this, then, be a distinct study, — the separate and express aim, — until the characteristics of divine love are impressed deeply on the heart, and all meaner affections recognize and bow to its dominion.

Another distinct object must be, to gain *an ever-wakeful consciousness of the divine presence*. The good child must learn to feel the Father's presence, must never lose sight of his eye; and it is essential to spiritual growth that the spirit human should be always aware of its contact with the Spirit divine. This is to be learned. This must become a habit. And it can only be by making it a subject of distinct study and effort; so that the soul, which the officious senses would restrict to this visible scene of things, may be able to

struggle away from them, and look alway at the things which are unseen and eternal.

Let these suffice for specimens of what is intended by stages in the religious progress. I trust I have said enough to exhibit my meaning clearly. The doctrine I would inculcate is, that, instead of proposing to ourselves, in general terms, the vast and vague purpose of becoming religious, we should parcel out our duty into its natural departments, and make each the object of separate discipline, until we have become in some measure adepts in it, and then attend in the same way to another. Of course, this method cannot be pursued to the letter; no one can exclusively cultivate his conscience, and have no care of his affections; nor cherish the thought of God, and yet neglect his conscience. On the contrary, attention to either of these objects greatly tends to fix attention on the other two; but unquestionably the greatest proficiency in regard to each and to all would be achieved by an effort specially directed to one at a time.

This general principle might be illustrated

and explained to a much greater extent ; but enough has been said to render it intelligible, and show its application. One thing at a time, though a rule impossible to be literally adhered to, is yet, as far as it may be observed, as wise in the progress of the religious character as in any other important affair.

END.



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